

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 11, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

In my 14 years in office, I have worked tirelessly to help patients, doctors, hospitals, and medical providers. I have always been committed to ensuring that our doctors have the resources they need to deliver high-quality health care across the country, especially for our seniors. The past month has been very difficult for all parties involved in Medicare, directly or indirectly. I want to set the record straight on what the Medicare debate has been about – politics.

Prior to the Fourth of July holiday, Republicans and Democrats worked together to produce a bipartisan bill that would replace the automatic 10 percent cut in doctors' Medicare reimbursement fees with a slight increase. The bill also called for a delay in the durable medical equipment (DME) competitive bidding program and has many other provisions of great interest to North Carolinians. The bill does all of this without cutting benefits for seniors enrolled in Medicare Advantage.

The Senate Democrat leadership, led by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), chose not to vote on the bipartisan bill that protects doctors and seniors. He instead demanded multiple votes on legislation that cuts the benefits of seniors who participate in the extremely popular Medicare Advantage program. That bill would cut \$13.8 billion from the Medicare Advantage fee-for-service plans over the next five years and almost \$47.5 billion over ten years. If their intent was to eliminate private health care coverage for over 2 million seniors, including over 200,000 North Carolinians, then they have probably succeeded.

By refusing to work together, the Democrat leadership not only wants to punish those who enjoy the benefits of Medicare Advantage, but they want to play politics with our seniors and the doctors and pharmacists who care for them. The claim by some Democrats and interest groups that I support cutting health care for our nation's seniors, disabled individuals, and military families is ridiculous on its face. The argument that I am intent on harming our nation's doctors and pharmacists is an outright lie.

I am a cosponsor of S. 3118, the Preserving Access to Medicare Act of 2008, introduced by Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) on June 11, 2008. S. 3118 prevents the scheduled payment cuts to doctors, increases physician reimbursements for 2008 and 2009, delays the DME competitive bidding program, and does many other good things – all without reducing access to Medicare Advantage. Congress could have solved this

issue weeks ago if Senator Reid had allowed a vote on the bipartisan Medicare bill. What in this proposal do Senate Democrats oppose? What amendments are they afraid of?

Access to quality, affordable health care is one of the most important issues facing our nation, and an honest and open debate is vital as we work on this issue. Rather than getting this honest and open debate from their leaders, North Carolinians, particularly doctors and patients, have been subject to partisan trickery, special interest pandering and a great deal of unfortunate and, in many cases, intentional misinformation.

On July 9, the Senate voted for the second time on H.R. 6331. The bill passed by unanimous consent and will be sent to the President. Before passage, I voted against cloture on the motion to proceed because Senator Reid was not going to allow any amendments to be offered and debated. I am pleased that doctors' reimbursements are now certain for this year, but I am still frustrated that the Democrat leadership and the special interest lobbying teams played politics with doctors and patients instead of working together to help those who depend on Medicare and those who provide valuable medical services across our state.

So where does that leave us? Next year, doctors face a mandated 21% cut in Medicare reimbursements. The politically-motivated raid on Medicare Advantage means the program's opponents can't use it for next year's reimbursement fix. Millions of seniors will be dropped from their health insurance program of choice, and will likely see their options for care decrease and their drug costs increase as a result. No structural changes are included in the "doctors' fix" legislation, nor were they even debated. This means solution options for next year are greatly reduced. The process and procedures that guided this piece of legislation have put us farther from reform and closer to government-controlled health care without choices for the American people.

Many who contacted my office were not willing to fight for the necessary changes to health care. I respect that decision, but rest assured, I will continue to fight. I will continue to seek the changes that are vital if we want our children and our grandchildren to have the best health care in the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Burr", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Richard Burr  
United States Senator